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# PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS

## Good practices and lessons learned from the Arab Region



The ILO estimates that 2.1 million people are engaged in domestic work across the Middle East and North Africa. With increased participation of women in the labour force across the region, families have become more and more reliant on migrant domestic workers to supplement their social care needs as a way of coping with inadequate public services and unaffordable private sector providers. The overwhelming majority of migrant domestic workers are women from Asian and African countries such as Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia and Ethiopia.

In the majority of Arab countries, migrant domestic workers are excluded from national labour legislation and are heavily dependent upon their employers through a restrictive sponsorship system known as Kafala. Under the Kafala system, a domestic worker's immigration status is tied to an individual employer or sponsor (kafeel) throughout their contract period. Domestic workers cannot enter the country, transfer employment nor leave the country for any reason without first obtaining explicit written permission from the kafeel. Commonly, kafeels exert further control over domestic workers by confiscating their passports and travel documents, despite legislation in some countries that declares this practice illegal. The informal, unregulated and isolated nature of their work renders migrant domestic workers vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, forced labour and trafficking.

In an effort to improve the situation faced by migrant domestic workers and support government efforts already underway, in early 2011 the International Labour Organisation (ILO) launched a country-specific pilot programme in Lebanon, 'Action Programme for Protecting the Rights of Women Domestic Workers

(PROWD)', with the objective of improving national labour migration governance and social dialogue as a means to enhance economic integration and improve working conditions for women domestic workers.

Several months later, in June 2011, delegates at the 100<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference adopted a historic international standard to improve the working conditions of domestic workers across the world. The adoption of this international standard provided a strong foundation for the PROWD project to effectively advocate on the rights of women domestic workers in Lebanon. The ILO's **Domestic Workers Convention (No.189)** and **accompanying Domestic Workers Recommendation (No. 201)** stipulate that domestic workers should have the same fundamental labour rights as any other worker: reasonable hours of work, weekly rest of at least 24 consecutive hours, a limit on in-kind payments, clear information on terms and conditions of employment, and respect for fundamental rights at work including freedom of association and collective bargaining.

To build on the experiences of the pilot initiative in Lebanon, and capitalise on the international momentum gained following the adoption of Convention No. 189, the Migration and Governance Network (MAGNET) of ILO's Regional Office for the Arab States embarked on a larger advocacy initiative in late 2012 which pushed for the ratification and implementation of Convention No. 189 in the Arab region. Entitled 'Decent Work for Domestic Workers: Advocating for Institutional Reform in the Middle East', this regional initiative aimed at providing options for Arab governments to reform national laws and migration policies related to domestic workers and bring them in line with international labour rights standards.

Through the PROWD and MAGNET projects, the ILO has endeavoured to make substantive changes in the lives of domestic workers by strengthening national capacities and institutions, and engaging in the long and complex process of influencing social perceptions and attitudes surrounding domestic work and workers. This report draws on the experiences of these two projects, showcasing the challenges, opportunities and outcomes from the implementation of project activities grouped across five thematic areas: (i) coordination mechanisms, (ii) policymaking, (iii) awareness-raising, (iv) organising and (v) capacity building. Each of the five sections within the report is structured such that overarching lessons learned generated from collective experiences are presented first, followed by 'boxed' country-specific case studies that reflect good practices.

In the spirit of learning from global experiences, the report also highlights a number of progressive case studies from countries outside of the region that have been instrumental in securing favourable working conditions for domestic workers. These international cases studies were presented and discussed during a Technical Workshop hosted by the PROWD and MAGNET projects, 'Dignity, Rights and Domestic Work in the Arab States', held 11-13 October 2014 in Istanbul, Turkey.

By identifying good practices and lessons learned the ILO hopes to foster dialogue and generate critical thinking on strategies and methodologies to inspire more effective design and implementation of future initiatives effecting domestic workers in Arab countries characterised by similar models of migration governance. Additionally, the findings and case studies documented in this report will have useful application for policymakers in both origin and destination countries, as well as for practitioners from trade unions, non-governmental organisations, religious organisations and other civil society groups working to protect and promote the labour rights of migrant domestic workers within the Arab region and beyond.

stakeholders may be invited to define priorities, provide technical input on policy and legal reform, and oversee the design and implementation of initiatives, thus sharing know-how and creating a greater sense of co-ownership and enhancing opportunities for cost-sharing and wider scale-up of interventions.

Ideally, a mechanism should be created to ensure that membership within national steering committees is retained, particularly in contexts where there may be a high member turnover rate, as this can help to ensure effective and uninterrupted oversight over initiatives in the long-term. One way to ensure continuity of membership may be to nominate particular persons to attend all meetings convened by the committee. Following attendance of a committee meeting, the designated member would then share relevant information with a 'taskforce' of people from within his or her respective institution, in this way creating a formalised information dissemination system.

Experience from the region has demonstrated the advantages of convening steering committee meetings on a frequent basis. These meetings are an important forum for sharing information, developing action plans, delegating responsibilities, building consensus among members, and creating a stronger alliance for advocating on domestic work issues. Creating teams within national steering committees that act as specialised task forces or thematic working groups has also been shown to be beneficial as this approach can garner support around particular domestic worker issues and strengthen lines of stakeholder accountability.

Within politically unstable environments, particular attention may be required to ensure on-going coordination and constancy in terms of committee membership. As traditional coordination mechanisms may not be able to operate effectively within such contexts, creativity is needed to develop alternative avenues for social dialogue consultation which may lead to greater success.

## STRENGTHENING COORDINATION MECHANISMS

Government-led efforts are essential for the successful development and implementation of initiatives that seek to improve the situation faced by migrant domestic workers. In particular, the establishment of national-level steering committees can allow governments to take a strong leadership role on domestic work issues through the coordination and involvement of multiple stakeholders, including relevant ministries, UN agencies, other international and regional organisations, trade unions and civil society organisations, private employment agencies, and embassies of sending countries. Where and when appropriate, various

[Box 1] Good practice: Participatory Newsletter

Strengthening coordination among stakeholders through the sharing of information

In 2007, the Government of Lebanon established a National Steering Committee on the situation of Women Migrant Domestic Workers by ministerial decree. Intended to ensure the continued and timely implementation of ILO’s project ‘Protecting Rights of Women Domestic Workers (PROWD)’, a Project Advisory Committee was later formed, - following a period of political instability – to coordinate with the National Steering Committee’s members and provide overall guidance, support and monitoring of the project.

Although the resignation of government did lead to some setbacks in policy development, the PROWD project succeeded in building relationships and partnerships with multiple stakeholders under the challenging political circumstances, including line ministries under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour, hence keeping the discussion on the rights of MDWs alive at the national level

One effective tool used to sustain coordination and information sharing among committee members and other stakeholders was the publication of a participatory newsletter entitled ‘Asraab’ (meaning “migrating flocks [of birds]” in Arabic). The newsletter allowed stakeholders to play an active role in disseminating information and to simultaneously keep abreast of progress with regard to other concurrent initiatives being carried out in Lebanon, which seek to improve the situation for migrant domestic workers.



REFORMING NATIONAL POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS TO ALIGN WITH INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS

Since coming into force on 6 June 2011, ILO’s Domestic Worker Convention No.189 has strengthened the grounds for advocating on domestic worker rights, providing a legitimate basis for national legal, policy and institutional reforms.

Convention No. 189, alongside Recommendation No. 201, contain a set of rights-based vocabulary that have been instrumental in influencing mainstream narratives and shifting public perceptions of domestic workers and the kafala system in some Arab countries, albeit slowly. Some change has been observed in Lebanon, where staff from a number of private employment agencies – who received sensitisation training from ILO on domestic worker rights – began to voluntarily replace the Arabic word for ‘servant’ with the term ‘domestic worker’ in their day-to-day language.

ILO’s advocacy strategy for the protection of domestic worker rights in the Arab region has principally taken a human rights and labour rights lens, using international standards, such as Convention No.189, as its key advocacy tool. While the rights-based approach is imperative to effect meaningful and principled change, it appears that focusing on international standards alone as the basis for action may not in itself lead to desired reforms and may need to be coupled with other strategies which incentivise governments and private employment agencies to enact positive changes.

In particular, there is a need to demonstrate how improving the living and working conditions of domestic workers can and will align with the social and economic interests of each country. Building a strong evidence-base through research can be a crucial step in demonstrating to stakeholders that improving the working and living conditions of domestic workers will have benefit for all members of society, including for Arab nationals. Such research can provide legitimacy to campaign efforts and the necessary foundation for making clear and informed

policy recommendations.

Once determined, it is important to present the broader vision of an improved national policy and legal framework to all stakeholders prior to any detailed discussion of specific drafts or texts as this can allow

for the development of a focused strategy, and avoids the development of a series of ad-hoc policy documents. Moreover, any strategy for the reform of policy and legislative reform should be accompanied by a targeted advocacy strategy, which builds momentum and support for its adoption.

**[Box 2] Good practice: Assessment of existing legislation and organisational structures as ground work for advocacy**

*Crafting recommendations for legal and procedural reforms to improve the working and living conditions of domestic workers*

Under ILO’s PROWD project in Lebanon, a thorough assessment of the existing legislation and organisational structures that deal with migrant domestic workers was carried out to demonstrate to government that a number of legal and procedural reforms must be enacted in order improve the working conditions of domestic workers, to allow for their integration in national labour laws and to dismantle the kafala sponsorship system.

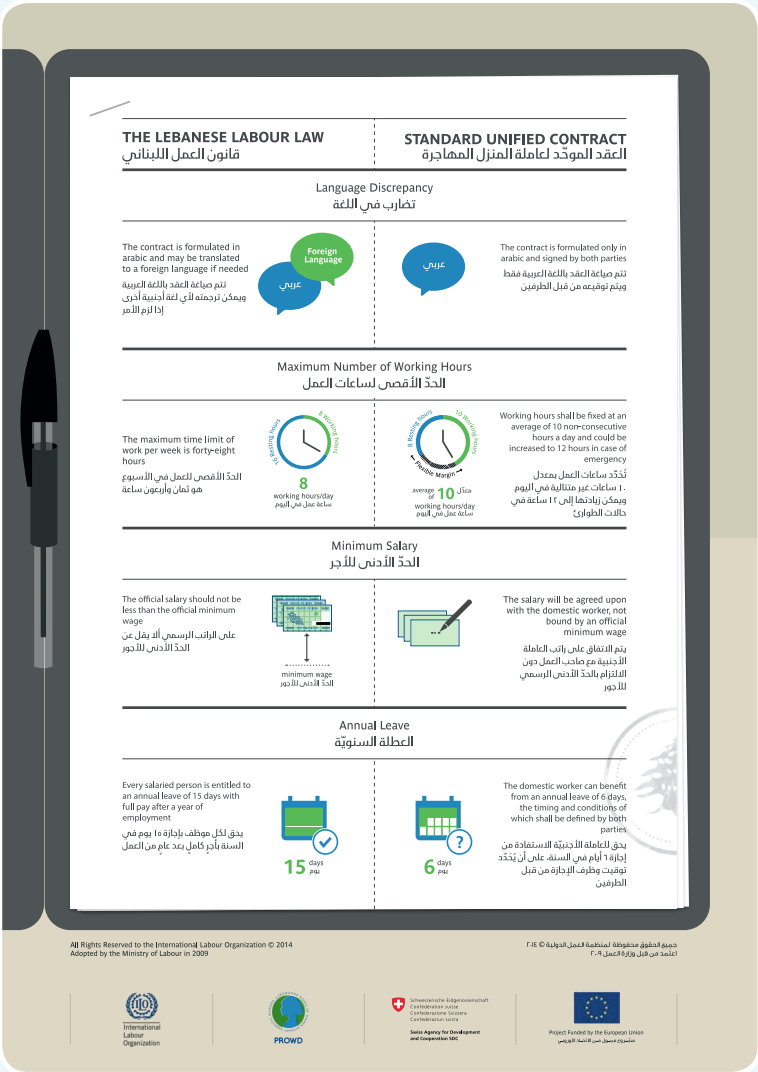
To this end, a series of documents were drafted in response to the initial assessment:

- A revision of the national labour law pointing to special provisions under which domestic workers could be integrated;
- A model unified contract to be signed by the employer and domestic worker;
- A decree aimed at monitoring and limiting the functions of private employment agencies.

Complementing the development of these documents, a number of model agreements were drafted and shared with concerned stakeholders. These model agreements, if enacted, would bind all signing parties to specific conditions designed to enhance the situation of domestic workers and provide a clear and solid base for effective legal change. These model agreements include:

- Bilateral governmental agreements between sending countries and Lebanon;
- An agreement between private agencies in Lebanon and the country of origin;
- An agreement between the Ministry of Labour and banks to ensure that domestic workers receive wage payments as per their employment contracts;
- An agreement between the Lebanese Government and non-governmental organisations on the provision of crisis shelters.

Given the length and complexity of the assessments, a short policy brief was later developed to summarise the key messages and encourage their wider dissemination and readership.





### **[Box 3] Good practice: Ratifying Convention No.189 and the impacts on national laws and policies**

#### *Improving labour standards for domestic workers in the Philippines and Italy*

Adoption of ILO's Convention No. 189 has successfully strengthened advocacy efforts in a number of sending and destination countries, leading to tangible changes in labour standards within the domestic work sector.

The Philippines was the second country, next to Uruguay, to ratify Convention No.189. Ratified by the President in May 2012, the Philippine Congress shortly thereafter passed Republic Act No. 10361 in January 2013, other wise known as Batas Kasambahay ('Domestic Workers Act'). With the enactment of RA10361, domestic workers have been brought under the realm of the national labour law providing them the same basic rights and protections that apply to other non-domestic workers. The provisions under the Act include a formal contract that clearly defines the terms and conditions of employment, the right to keep in their possession travel and identity documents, a minimum wage, compulsory social insurance coverage and healthcare, and set hours of rest and a weekly day off.

As a labour sending country, ratification of Convention No.189 has given the Filipino Government greater leverage on which to advocate for the protection of Filipino migrant domestic workers abroad. The Government has enhanced its opportunities to enter into bilateral, regional and multi-lateral agreements with receiving countries by setting clear standards with regard to the recruitment, hiring and employment practices of Filipino nationals. In 2013, the Philippines signed two bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia and Jordan. There are three more agreements with Lebanon, Kuwait and Oman currently in the pipeline.

Italy, by comparison, is the first labour receiving country – and 4th globally – to ratify Convention No. 189 (January 2013). In line with provisions enshrined under Italy's Civil Code, the expansion of domestic worker rights has included the implementation of a National Contract for Domestic Workers. All aspects of the contract are subject to collective bargaining and tripartite social dialogue. Basic principles of the employment contract include a four per cent minimum salary increase every two years, 26 days of annual leave, full pay in case of illness, overtime compensation, and administrative sanctions for employers in cases of non-compliance. In effect, the ratification and subsequent implementation of Convention No. 189 has allowed domestic workers in Italy greater freedom of association, enhanced social integration, and improved the perception of migrant workers in a sector which is highly valued by Italian society.

### **VOICING DOMESTIC WORKERS' RIGHTS – THE POWER OF ORGANISING**

Organising migrant domestic workers can be remarkably challenging within a restrictive legislative environment as in many Arab countries they do not benefit from adequate legal protection and their isolated working conditions place them among the most vulnerable of workers to exploitation and abuse. Like any other worker, a domestic worker will hesitate to join a union from fear of being fired. With no safety net or guarantee of another job, domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to the threats of their employers. For live-in workers, being fired also means losing their home. Migrant domestic workers also run the risk losing their work permit.

It is important to recognise from early on that organising can be a lengthy process and it can be difficult to sustain the motivation of trade union members and retain a sense of group solidarity. Arranging regular advocacy and recreational activities can be an effective way to

ensure on-going engagement of domestic workers who are involved in organising. It is essential, however, to take into consideration the fact that many domestic workers face restrictions on use of their free time and face a number of aforementioned risks to their job and personal security.

Options should be explored to identify various legal entry points available for organising, as recently took place in Kuwait, Lebanon and Jordan (see Box 4). In this way, research can be instrumental in mapping possible legal options for collective action and tailoring initiatives to suit the specific legislative environments in each country's context. Research can be also useful for assessing the risks and legal safeguards in place for protecting domestic workers throughout the organising process, so as to identify viable pathways that ensure workers' personal security and safe participation.

Creating an enabling environment ripe for organising is crucial for start-up initiatives to come to their full fruition. Experience from Lebanon – where the first

trade union for domestic workers in the Arab region has recently been established (see Box 5) – points to the value of mobilising domestic workers within the existing structure of an established trade union or cooperative that is willing to accommodate an initiative specific to the domestic work sector. Connecting domestic workers with members from already existing trade unions has the added benefit of providing them with the opportunity to learn from the lived experiences of successful initiatives through a peer-to-peer approach.

Creating an environment conducive for organising further necessitates the existence of a mechanism for the process of collective bargaining, which in turn necessitates the legitimate representation of domestic workers and employers. Collective bargaining entails bringing to the table a minimum of two counterparts in order to negotiate and reach agreement on how to regulate working conditions, highlighting the importance of establishing both domestic worker trade unions and employers representative groups, with each playing a key role in the social dialogue process.

#### **[Box 4] Good practice: Founding the first trade union for domestic workers in the Arab region**

*Fostering an environment conducive for collective action through sensitisation of workers and building commitment of existing trade union bodies*

ILO's Participatory Action Research successfully led to the establishment of the first domestic worker trade union in Lebanon and in the region. The objective of the research was to support the formation of a domestic worker trade organisation, while building synergy between the trade union and relevant NGOs. A number of NGOs in Lebanon already provide individual services to domestic workers, yet a domestic worker trade union would have a different mandate; to build a collective movement among domestic workers as a way of improving the industry at large. Through research, ILO wanted to explore the possibility of domestic workers leading, rather than receiving, such services.



The research process commenced by conducting a series of focus group discussions to gain an understanding of domestic workers' perspectives and gauge their level of motivation for organising. Domestic worker community leaders were closely involved in validating the guiding questions, in recruiting participants, and in facilitating the group discussions. Group discussions were carried out in two stages: first, participants were grouped according to nationality, and second, all group were brought together in a larger multi-national forum. Through this process, participants came to recognise that although they originate from different countries, each with their own contextual specificities, the problems faced by domestic workers are sector-wide and not bound to nationality. This realisation served to build a sense of solidarity among domestic workers from various nationalities and strengthen the larger group dynamic.

By sensitising and motivating domestic workers, and simultaneously gaining the interest and commitment of the National Federation of Trade Unions of Workers and Employees in Lebanon (FENASOL), the research process provided impetus for the creation of a Founding Committee for Domestic Workers under the broader umbrella of FENASOL. Consisting of both Lebanese and migrant domestic workers, members of the Founding Committee collectively identified priority issues and developed a work plan for the implementation of future actions.

On Women's Day, 8 March 2014, the Founding Committee held its first awareness-raising event entitled "Equality Among Women, Equality Among Workers". It was announced at this event that with FENASOL's support, the Founding Committee would soon become an independent trade union. FENASOL is currently revising the relevant bylaws and providing capacity building skills training in preparation for this transition process, which is due to take place on 25 January 2015.

**[Box 5] Good practice: Organising domestic workers and employers in Uruguay**

*Developing a national domestic worker regulation through tripartite social dialogue*

In Uruguay, the dual establishment of a domestic worker trade union and an employers representative group has enabled strong tripartite social dialogue that has ultimately led to the development of a national regulation governing the domestic work sector.

Successfully overcoming numerous challenges in the process of organising, the Labour Association of Domestic Workers was established in 1975 and later transformed to become the Domestic Workers Union in 1985, as an affiliate to the Uruguay Trade Union Confederation. Although domestic workers have the right to collective bargaining under Uruguayan law, it was not until the League of Housewives was created and later recognised as a legitimate employers representative organisation that the Domestic Workers Union had the opportunity to negotiate for the first time.

With the objective of strengthening the collective bargaining process, ILO provided capacity building to the Domestic Workers Union and the League of Housewives in the form of training on negotiation in addition to support on developing an information campaign, establishing legal assistance for group members, and jointly publishing an information guide to inform members of their rights and duties according to national law.

Prior to the formal recognition of the League of Housewives as a legitimate employers representative group, collective bargaining efforts had not been successful. Following recognition, however, a series of collective agreements quickly ensued in 2008, 2011 and 2013. These agreements stipulated a set minimum wage and rates for incremental wage increases, a national holiday for domestic workers (to be celebrated annually on 25th August), the creation of a Tripartite Commission on Occupational Health and Safety, and the creation of a Committee to Establish Categories of Domestic Workers. Tripartite discussions on the details of these agreements provided the required consensus for the drafting of a new domestic worker bill that was subsequently endorsed by the Parliament.

**AWARENESS RAISING AND ADVOCACY –  
ESSENTIAL TOOLS TO PROMOTE DOMESTIC  
WORKER RIGHTS**

Advocacy campaigns can play an important role in shifting societal perspectives and applying pressure on governments to enact the necessary policy and institutional reforms that can protect the rights of domestic workers. Future efforts should identify and capitalise on advocacy initiatives which are already underway in the region, extending on existing momentum and their experiences to date. Building an alliance of concerned stakeholders who come together to advocate collectively on domestic worker issues can ensure a coordinated campaign approach, with clear and focussed messaging, ultimately paving the way for wider-reaching impact and the cost-sharing of activities; a large-scale campaign with multiple sources of funding is more likely to sustain activities beyond the end of a single project cycle.

The ILO is well placed to provide technical assistance to its constituents and other entities on advocacy strategies, to coordinate and support implementing actors to carry out their various initiatives, and to undertake research that supports evidence-based policymaking. Experience from the region confirms that the ILO's mandate should

remain focussed on these key areas of expertise, rather than taking direct responsibility for the implementation of activities.

The ILO Regional Office for the Arab States has also led the development and piloting of awareness raising tools and activities. Although efforts have typically targeted small-scale audiences, these tools and activities can serve as pilot studies for scale-up and/or replication in other country contexts. Collaboration with and building capacity of key actors may be essential to achieve the desired level of impact and to reach out to target audiences. Governments, in particular, can play an important role in raising awareness on domestic workers rights and other issues at the broader societal level given their oversight of public institutions and services.

In Lebanon, for example, the ILO and its partners have produced a series of interactive and engaging books, board games and other learning materials for children and teachers with the objective of building a future generation supportive of migrant domestic workers. With the support of the Ministry of Education, these materials have been tested in Lebanese public and private primary schools and secondary schools with the hope they will eventually be incorporated into the

national curricula for a sustained and large-scale impact., As changes to the national curricula only take place periodically, it is useful to track when the

curricula is next due to be changed as this may be a critical window for the introduction of revisions.

**[Box 6] Good practice: Information guide for migrant domestic workers**

*Raising awareness of migrant domestic workers of available emergency and grievance services and their rights under national laws and policies*

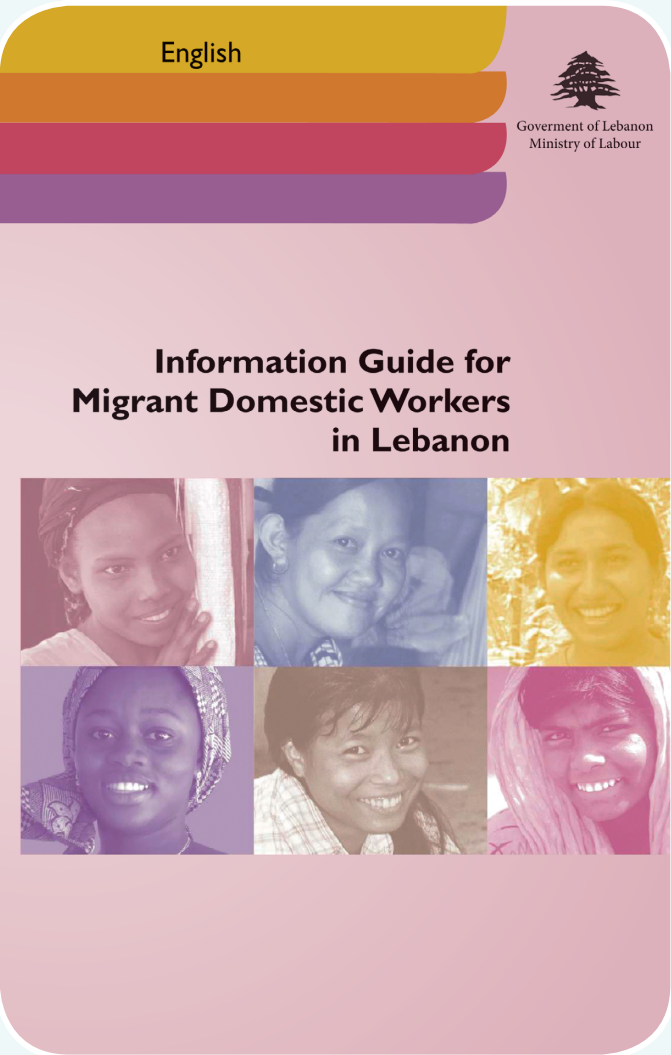
An Information Guide for Migrant Domestic Workers was developed in late 2012 by the ILO in joint collaboration with members of the National Steering Committee on Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon, established under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour.

Available in hardcopy booklets and an interactive electronic version, the Information Guide contains written and pictorial information for migrant domestic workers to learn about their rights under national laws and policies, including their rights under the provisions of the unified ‘work contract for migrant domestic workers’ approved by the Ministry in 2009. The Information Guide further contains a list of emergency contacts for services offered by the Government, police, embassies, non-governmental and other organisations, as well as useful information on pre-departure training courses and migrants’ associations in the main countries of origin.

Disseminating the Information Guide to migrant domestic workers relies on the will and collaboration of a number of different actors, including Government, civil society organisations and embassies of sending countries. The dissemination strategy also goes beyond traditional channels by reaching out to domestic workers through money transfer points and some pre-departure points within countries of origin. While certainly a step in the right direction, linkages with pre-departure points in these countries need to be further strengthened to increase the number of domestic workers who receive the Information Guide prior to their arrival in Lebanon.

Awareness materials targeting migrant domestic workers need to be compatible with their needs and capabilities. In this light, and to ensure wider readership and use, the hardcopy booklet is available in six of the most common languages spoken by migrant domestic workers. However, greater focus should be given to design initiatives that rely less heavily on written forms of communication (e.g face-to-face sensitisation sessions that are communicated verbally) to accommodate the needs of workers with low levels of literacy.

The Information Guide has been highly successful in raising awareness among migrant domestic workers, although several challenges still remain. These include increasing the rate of circulation among employers and guaranteeing the continued production of hardcopy booklets given the high costs associated with printing. An impact evaluation is also required to assess the effectiveness of the Information Guide and make recommendations to enhance its dissemination, relevance and use.





### **[Box 7] Good practice: The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) '12 by 12' Campaign**

*Building a broad coalition of partners to advocate on the ratification of Convention No. 189*

Led by the International Trade Union Confederation, the '12 by 12' Campaign is a broad coalition of trade unions, NGOs and civil society partners in more than 90 countries, working together to improve the rights and protection for domestic workers. The Campaign's international partners include the International Domestic Workers Network, International Union of Food Workers, European Trade Union Confederation, Human Rights Watch, Anti-Slavery International, Amnesty International, Caritas, SOLIDAR, Migrant Forum Asia, Wold Solidarity and FOS.

Through their collective efforts, partners of the '12 by 12' Campaign have applied pressure on governments to ratify Convention No. 189 and modify their national labour laws accordingly. To date, the initial goal of attaining 12 ratifications by the end of 2012 has been surpassed with a total of 15 countries having ratified Convention No. 189 as of late 2014. On account of these successes, it was decided to continue the campaign several years past its expected end date.

Notably, no country within the Arab region has yet ratified the Domestic Workers Convention No. 189. However, with the recent founding of the first domestic worker trade union in Lebanon, it is hoped that coordinated campaign initiatives similar to the '12 by 12' Campaign will soon take flight within the region.



## **BUILDING NATIONAL CAPACITIES TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS**

A positive and long-lasting shift in perspective is unlikely to happen over night since cultural and personal beliefs are often deeply ingrained and resistant to change. Effective capacity building may therefore require participants to attend a number of follow up training sessions that allow for meaningful exchange and in-depth discussion. This is particularly the case with sensitisation training on the rights and protection of domestic workers, since many participants attending the training sessions are often themselves employers of domestic workers and may be presented with some personal conflict of interest.

It may be necessary to hold a number of sensitisation trainings – on issues such as racial and gender discrimination, the significance of migrant domestic workers in society, etc. – before introducing technical material on labour standards, thereby providing a longer time for participants to absorb and internalise the key messages surrounding domestic worker rights and protection. Experience demonstrates that a sustained shift in the value systems of participants may be achieved through the delivery of a set of training modules by highly-skilled facilitators over a longer period of time.



### **[Box 8] Good practice: Private Employment Agencies adopt a Code of Conduct**

*In the absence of specific laws protecting migrant domestic workers, recruitment agencies have developed a self-regulatory tool to define the framework of their activities*

With technical support from the ILO and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Syndicate of the Owners of Recruitment Agencies in Lebanon (SORAL) adopted a code of conduct in June 2013 aimed at upgrading their member agencies' performance and ensuring the rights of migrant domestic workers.

According to SORAL, the absence of Lebanese legislation to regulate the domestic work sector prompted the Syndicate to develop a code of conduct with the intention of distinguishing its member agencies from illegal and unregulated agencies, which often fail to commit to the ethics of the recruitment business. At the national level, SORAL also seeks to improve what it considers to be a "tarnished image of Lebanese society", resulting from improper behaviours of a number of families and private employment agencies.

Nonetheless, SORAL acknowledges that while a code of conduct may make some positive headway in regulating private employment agencies, an essential element for its effective implementation is the endorsement of appropriate national legislation to effectively govern and monitor the domestic work sector. In its current form, SORAL's code of conduct is largely aligned, although to a limited extent, with relevant national laws and international standards.

To ensure greater transparency, a government and NGO labour inspection system is required, together with inspection by the Syndicate, that goes beyond the current system relying heavily on self-regulation. Consideration might also be given to develop a system whereby the issuing of a government licence is contingent on whether a private employment agency signs the code of conduct.

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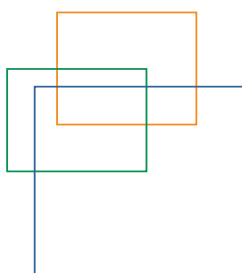
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